

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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S E C R E T VIENTIANE 5019

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PFOR, LA, US

SUBJECT: APPEAL FOR HELP FROM GENERAL VANG PAO

REF: VIENTIANE 4992

1. CONTRARY TO MY EXPECTATIONS, SISOUK WAS NOT AT LAST NIGHT'S WEDDING RECEPTION OF HOUMPHANH SAIGNASITH, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR PUBLIC WORKS. (AT WEDDING CEREMONY IN MORNING VIRTUALLY ENTIRE CABINET, INCLUDING MOST PATHET LAO MEMBERS, WAS PRESENT.) I THEREFORE CALLED ON SISOUK AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE THIS MORNING. I WENT OVER THE HISTORY OF OUR SUPPORT TO GENERAL VANG PAO AND PARTICULARLY OUR DISCUSSIONS OVER THE PAST YEAR REGARDING THE DEMOBILIZATION OF SOME OF HIS FORCES. I WENT OVER THE NUMBERS AND THE AMOUNTS INVOLVED AS SET FORTH IN THE TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE. I POINTED OUT THAT IN MID-MAY THE GENERAL HAD SIGNED A MEMORANDUM BY WHICH HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE USG WAS FULLY DISCHARGING ALL ITS OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS HIS FORCES ON TURNING OVER TO HIM TWO MONTHS PAY FOR THESE FORCES AMOUNTING TO OVER 400 MILLION KIPS.

2. SISOUK SEEMED TO KNOW ALL THESE FACTS AND ACKNOWLEDGED THE VALIDITY OF OUR APPROACH. HOWEVER, THE PRIME MINISTER AND HE WERE VERY MUCH CONCERNED BY THE POSSIBLE DEGRADATION OF THE SITUATION IN MR II WITH SEVERAL THOUSAND ARMED MEOS IN A STATE OF REBELLION.

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WITH THIS FEAR IN MIND THE PRIME MINISTER HAD DIRECTED

THAT EACH MEO TO BE DEMOBILIZED WOULD HAVE TO TURN OVER HIS ARMS BEFORE RECEIVING A DEMOBILIZATION BONUS OF 100 THOUSAND KIPS. SISOUK EMPHASIZED SEVERAL TIMES HIS CONCERN WITH REGARD TO THE DANGERS INVOLVED IN THIS SITUATION. HE CONSIDERS VANG PAO HIGHLY AND BELIEVES THAT VANG PAO ALONE CAN KEEP MR II CALM. HE IS ALSO CONVINCED THAT VANG PAO IS PHYSICALLY THREATENED, AND HE WANTS TO SAVE HIM.

3. I ASKED HIM WHETHER GRANTING A BONUS TO DEMOBILIZED SOLDIERS JUST IN MR II MIGHT NOT CREATE A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT NOT ONLY IN THAT REGION BUT ALSO IN OTHER REGIONS. SISOUK WAVED THE POINT ASIDE SAYING THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT HE COULD EXPLAIN THE MATTER TO THE OTHER REGIONS. HE WAS ALSO CONVINCED THAT THE 1800 MEN VANG PAO WAS TALKING ABOUT REPRESENTED THE SUM OF THE PROBLEM. I ASKED SISOUK HOW HE COULD BE CONFIDENT THAT PAYING 200 MILLION KIPS, OR 100 THOUSAND KIPS PER SOLDIER, WOULD LIQUIDATE THE PROBLEM. SISOUK ASSERTED THAT VANG PAO HAD ASSURED THE PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF THAT THIS INDEED WOULD TAKE CARE OF MR II.

4. IN AN ASIDE SISOUK MENTIONED THAT YESTERDAY WHEN VANG PAO MET WITH HIM AND LATER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, THE GENERAL WAS BITTER TOWARD THE AMERICANS. THE MEOS HAD LOST 11,000 KILLED AND 27,000 WOUNDED, THE GENERAL ALLEGED, AND AFTER ALL THIS FIGHTING THEY FELT LET DOWN. SISOUK REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THE THOUGHT THAT THE MEOS WERE VERY DIFFERENT IN CHARACTER FROM THE LAO. YOU CAN REASON WITH THE LATTER, HE COMMENTED, BUT WITH THE FORMER YOU HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL: ONE DAY HE IS YOUR FRIEND, THE NEXT, YOUR ENEMY.

5. SISOUK SUMMARIZED HIS REQUEST: THE PRIME MINISTER HAD DECIDED ON GIVING VANG PAO 200 MILLION KIPS TO DEMOBILIZE 1800 MEN. HE, SISOUK, HAD BEEN ABLE TO FIND 100 MILLION KIPS; HE ASKED US FOR THE OTHER 100 MILLION KIPS. "ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND AND TWENTY DOLLARS IS A CHEAP PRICE TO PAY FOR RESOLVING THIS PROBLEM," HE COMMENTED. HE THEN ASKED WHETHER I HAD HEARD ANYTHING

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FROM WASHINGTON. I SAID THAT I HAD REPORTED OUR INITIAL CONVERSATION TO WASHINGTON AND WOULD BE REPORTING THIS ONE. I TOLD HIM THAT I WAS FRANKLY NOT OPTIMISTIC REGARDING A FAVORABLE REPLY. WE FELT THAT WE HAD GONE A LONG WAY TOWARDS HELPING THE GENERAL BY GIVING HIM AMPLE WARNING, PROVIDING HIM AMPLE FUNDS, GIVING HIM ASSISTANCE FOR PROJECTS THAT SHOULD PROVE OF INCREASING ECONOMIC BENEFIT. IT WAS NOW A LAO PROBLEM.

HOWEVER, I RECOGNIZED THE DIMENSIONS
OF THIS PARTICULAR PROBLEM AND THOUGHT THAT BECAUSE OF
ITS POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES, THE AMBASSADOR SHOULD HAVE
AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A JUDGMENT. HE WAS RETURNING
ON JULY 3 AND I VERY MUCH HOPED THAT THE MATTER COULD
WAIT AT LEAST THAT LONG. HE SAID THAT WOULD BE PERFECTLY
ALRIGHT. AS I WAS LEAVING HE DROPPED A WORD
WHICH UNDOUBTEDLY REFLECTS THE VIEW OF MOST LAO LEADERS:
"AFTER ALL, US HAS SOME RESPONSIBILITY FOR VANG PAO
IN LIGHT OF YOUR CLOSE RELATIONS OVER SEVERAL YEARS."

6. RECOMMENDATION: THAT INTERESTED WASHINGTON AGENCIES
BEGIN TO CONSIDER THE PROBLEM BUT SUSPEND ANY DECISIONS
UNTIL AMBASSADOR HAS HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW THE
ENTIRE MATTER. HE HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH IT SINCE HIS
ARRIVAL AND HE WILL HAVE TO BEAR WHATEVER CONSEQUENCES
MAY FLOW FROM WHATEVER DECISION IS MADE.
CHAPMAN

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